

Against the Grain

Volume 26 | Issue 3

Article 45

2014

Analyze This: Usage and Your Collection

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Recommended Citation

Leonard, Elisabeth and McEvoy, Kathleen (2014) "Analyze This: Usage and Your Collection," *Against the Grain*: Vol. 26: Iss. 3, Article 45.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7771/2380-176X.6785>

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Analyze This: Usage and Your Collection — Yours, Mine, and Ours: Market Information and its Impact on Product Development and Use

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I love innovation and am pleased to be a member of an online product development team; every day is exciting, interesting, unpredictable, and challenging. I never know what question will come my way — and my colleagues can never be entirely sure what answer I will provide in return! Like all market researchers and product developers, we spend a lot of time discussing who a product is for and how will the product be used. In the development stage, this can seem a bit theoretical, which is why participatory design can be so meaningful. Talking directly to your end users as a product moves from concept to market keeps the product focused on its ultimate potential, even though until a product is truly in the marketplace and is actually being used, while it can be predicted or forecasted, it can still seem mysterious.

The same can be true for the buyer or licensor of a product. When a library subscribes to a new e-resource, the librarians often have conducted multiple trials, talking to faculty, students, researchers, and to other librarians. They determine potential need and kick the product's tires to see if it functions as they believe it should. Even so, products don't always receive the anticipated use, leaving librarians to reassess the product. Did they misjudge the need? Do users know about the product? Are users getting their needs met with another resource? Is there something about the functionality of the product that creates a barrier to use? Was the product discoverable?

Imagine the Following:

A library decides to be a development partner for a product being developed. Because the product hasn't been developed, they cannot be sure how useful the final product will be, but because they have conducted satisfaction surveys and an analysis of gaps in their collection, they think the proposed product has some potential. By serving as a development partner, they will be able to provide direct feedback to the publisher that impacts the way the product is built. For the publisher, by the time a library has been approached to become a development partner, a lot of research has already been conducted, including the potential use cases for various types of libraries and various types of researchers. Having vocal development partners provides deeper and more real-time insights into how a product will be installed, how it will be discovered, how it will be used, and what the desired user experience is for different users.

For the publisher, there may have been more than a year's worth of ideation, research, edito-

rial commissioning, and platform development work that led to the library either beta testing the product with a goal of releasing the product relatively soon or bringing a development partner in to check the use cases.

Product Development and Market Research

As is true for any organization, we at **SAGE** start by assessing what we already know. Have we had requests for a product similar to what we are considering? How many people have asked? Where are they located? Do they have anything in common? Do we see any trends in areas of research that illustrate a burgeoning and unmet need? This is not very different than what librarians do when they hear of a new product or if they receive a patron's request that the library acquire a product!

Optimally, we are able to leverage prior knowledge (including knowledge derived from print sales) with new information to frame the potential and expected use of an online product. To suss out the potential use, there is a mass of research conducted including, but not limited to: interviews, focus groups, surveys, desk research, and observational studies. We have multiple editorial and library advisory boards, who we bounce ideas off of in order to test potential product concepts with an audience that understands our point of view. Because advisory board members have a deeper understanding of our company, combined with their own expertise, they are able to challenge or support that idea in a way that balances the research conducted with individuals who are not afforded as much context.

As we decide the fate of a product concept, we predict who we expect to use a product and what they might need from it. From there, we outline how we expect the product to be used by each target user group. It is from those use cases that we develop the ideal functionality for a product, thinking of what the expected user pathways are, and how a minimum viable product would work to meet defined user needs. Should a concept receive the green light, and once we know why and how a target persona will experience the site, product development begins and we focus on delivering the tools needed along the user pathway in order to help the user find what they need as easily and quickly as possible. We want for each experience in our products to delight the user — not to cause them unnecessary frustration.

On the surface, this seems like a clinical, clean process. In actuality, it can be very messy, in part because we're balancing user and buyer needs, which often do not align! Before I came to **SAGE**, I thought I understood just how different institutions, their affiliated libraries, and their researchers can be, but after nearly three years of speaking with people from around the world, I can say that in some aspects all researchers seem the same; there are so many nuances that make putting our market research results together into a useful narrative. These nuances express what the commonalities are that rise above individual researcher needs, while still looking for those challenges that even if unique to a segment of the population, would require a solution in order for a product to be useful. However, even this is more complicated than it might sound, as relaying all of the relevant nuances is not always possible — and of course, the market is in a state of flux, where researcher and buyer needs regularly change.

Of course, what is very difficult for any publisher to predict is what level of use a single library might expect from a product or what level of use would be seen as acceptable. Ideally, knowing this customer information provides both the content creator and the content buyer the ability to create use cases that put together all the research done into a narrative that describes the user experience. Employing usage benchmarks, which provide an average baseline, can actually dilute the ability to understand the needs and potential use of an e-resource within various types of organizations.

So, we all count on the feedback of our customers to let us know if they are getting what they expect from the products they have invested in and hope for verbal feedback, in addition to the feedback we receive by the numbers of renewals and cancellations. If you ever wondered why you get surveys or requests for interviews to discuss your satisfaction with products you have renewed AND those that you cancelled, it is in no small part due to our keen desire to determine what is going well and where we have room to improve. Even knowing that sometimes libraries are cancelling products that they like and budgetary constraints are pitting beloved products against each other has value.

Working Together

For libraries and for publishers, new products can be a costly venture. Because of the

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investments, both parties are likely to conduct research before and after making the investment, and even though they are each studying the same product, the research questions are just different enough to lead to different research approaches and different types of data. Ideally, publishers and libraries are working together to answer these questions, sharing what we are able to share so that the product we produce and that libraries acquire can be both useful and used.

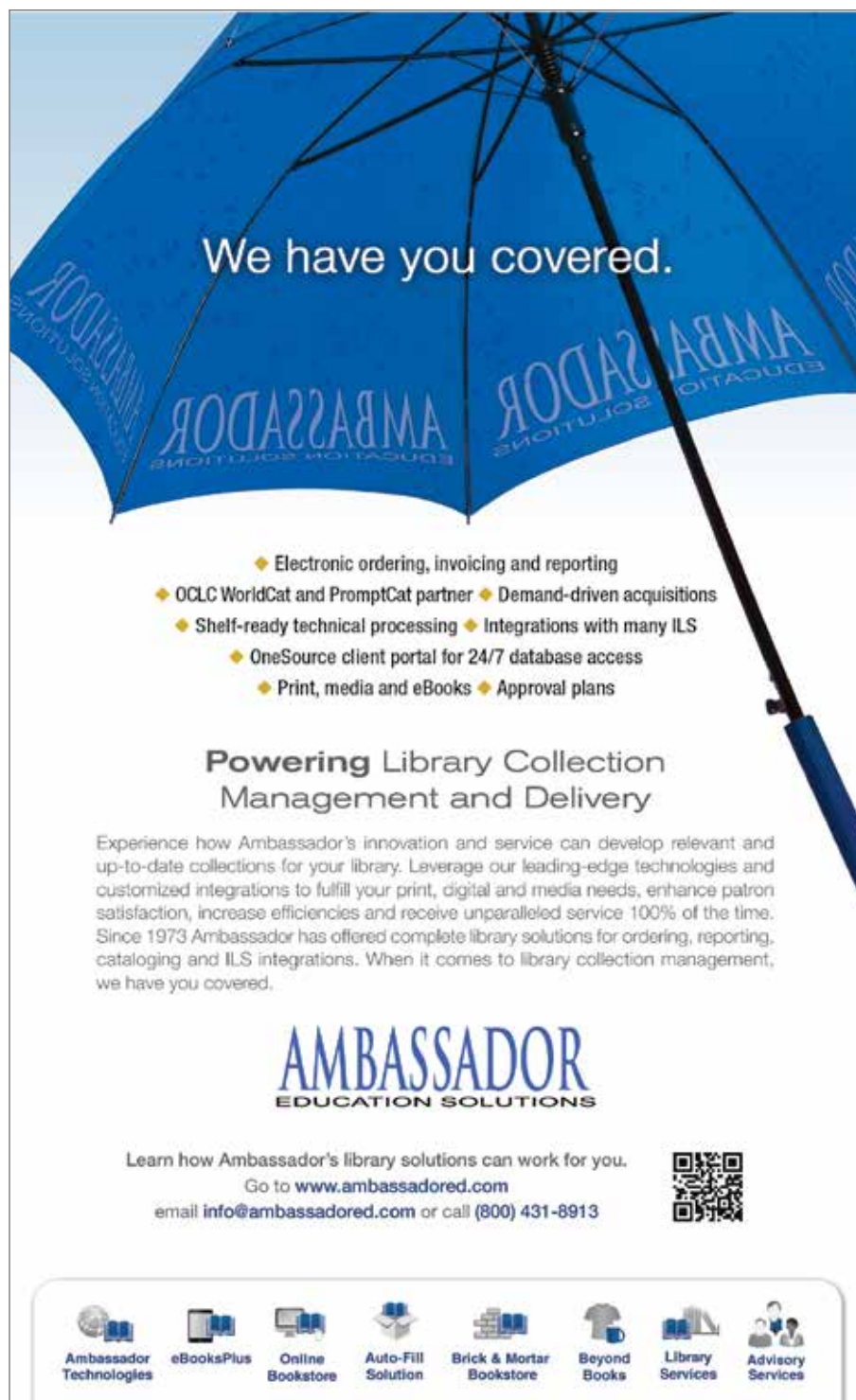
This collaboration can include sharing the results of research where possible, having libraries serve as development partners with publishers, publishers creating use cases for a product in concert with user and buyer feedback — and in the end, all of the stakeholders sharing what matters to each of us in the information ecosystem. In order for this to work optimally, we must each let down our guards a bit so that we can learn from and appreciate each other's experiences. 🌱

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a lot of talent, in areas ranging from R&D to services and support, to complement our existing staff at **Innovative**. I've already talked about **Bill Shickling**, **Jodi Bellinger**, and the great group from **Polaris**. In the same vein, **Dr. Vinod Chachra** assembled a strong and experienced group of people at **VTLS**, who we're integrating into the **Innovative** team. I'm very excited about bringing the groups together to focus not only on serving our customers today, but on developing next-generation library technology products that will help our libraries keep pace with the rapid pace of change in their communities.

It's true we're growing fast, but I wouldn't say it's too fast. We've been investing strategically in both people and technology infrastructure in anticipation of growth and we have the resources and the management bandwidth to handle the integration of both organizations, which is well underway. We're very focused on not missing a beat with any of our customers and look forward to pooling our talents and being one of the leaders in providing technology solutions to libraries for many years to come.

Ambassador Education Solutions has hired the delightfully astute **Michael Cooper** as **Business Development Manager** of its **Library Services Division**. **Michael** has more than three decades of experience in the library services industries, where he has helped libraries around the world build robust collections of the most in-demand titles. "Today's libraries are undergoing a major transformation with access to new kinds of resources and emerging delivery channels," said **Steven**



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M. Blicht, COO of **Ambassador Education Solutions**. "Michael brings a tremendous amount of insight and inspiring new ideas that we believe will help strengthen library programs everywhere." Michael has started and operated his own library supply businesses over the last few decades. Most recently, he served as president of **BUSCA**, a niche library supplier of print and non-print titles, including difficult to find and limited distribution journals and periodicals, textbooks, reference works, monographs, and multimedia. He is a graduate

of **Colgate University**. **Ambassador** will be exhibiting in booth #1718 at **ALA** coming up in Las Vegas June 27th through June 30th. www.ambassadorred.com

Returning to **BUSCA**, we told you online (May 19) that **John Riley** was leaving **BUSCA** and was on to other things. **John** is working with **ATG** to do **Quirkies** and to attend some meetings for us, etc. He just returned from **SSP**.

Has everyone been as interested as I am in the **Amazon/Hachette** fight/dispute about

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